DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 409 384 UD 031 774

AUTHOR Bowman, Sharon L.; And Others
TITLE African American or Female: How Do We Identify Ourselves?
PUB DATE Aug 95
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association (103rd, New York, NY, August 1995).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150) -- Tests/Questionnaires (160)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Black Colleges; *Black Students; *College Students; *Females; Feminism; Higher Education; *Racial Identification; *Self Concept; Sex Bias; *Sex Discrimination; Sex Role; Student Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS *African Americans

ABSTRACT

African American female college students attending either a predominantly African American or predominantly White coed institution were surveyed about their racial identity levels, sex role attitude levels, and perceptions of racism and sexism in a school-related vignette. There were 95 participants from the predominantly African American midwestern university, and 90 from the predominantly midwestern university A small sample of men was also surveyed. It was expected that women at the predominantly African American school would be more likely to perceive sex bias, while those at the predominantly white school would perceive race bias. The results indicate that women at the white school did perceive more race bias, but those at the African American school perceived both types of bias. Women at the two types of institutions did not differ in levels of feminist attitudes, but those at the predominantly African American school seemed to pay more attention to sexual discrimination. Comparison with the small sample of men shows that women have higher feminism scores and lower immersion (a measure of a pro-African American, anti-white attitude) scores than their male counterparts. Implications and limitations are discussed. (Contains two tables.) (Author/SLD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 409 384

African American or Female: How Do We identify Ourselves?

Presentation given at the annual convention of the American Psychological Association
New York City
August 14, 1995

Sharon L. Bowman, Ph.D.
Va Lecia Cureton, MA
Karen M. Mellum, MA
Maria Alarcon, MA
Belkeis Altareb, MA
Gale Valtinson, MA
Ball State University

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sharon L. Bowman

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

The first presenter may be contacted through: Department of Counseling Psychology and Guidance Services, Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

UD031774

Abstract

African American female college students attending either a predominantly African American or predominantly white coed institution were surveyed about their racial identity levels, sex role attitude levels, and perceptions of racism and sexism in a school-related vignette. A small sample of men were also surveyed. It was expected that women at a predominantly African American school would be more likely to perceive sex bias, while those at a predominantly white school would perceive race bias. The results indicated that women at the white school did perceive more race bias, but those at the African American school perceived both types of bias. Implications and limitations are discussed.

African American or Female: How Do we Identify Ourselves?

African American women are faced with the double injustices of racism and sexism (Scott, 1982). As a result, African American women have had to struggle to overcome the deleterious effects of oppression (Hooks, 1990). The impact of prejudice and oppression has been discussed by several authors (e.g., Adorna, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950; Lee, 1991; Parham, 1989, 1993; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), but these authors failed to address the unique experiences of African American women in regards to prejudice and discrimination.

Some authors have attempted to address the role African American women hold in American society as a result of their dual status. King (1975) explained that African American women, as a group, are in a unique position in this society due to the duality of their minority status. African American women, in particular, have been assigned a distinct social location in society as a result of the combined effects of racism and sexism (Dugger, 1988).

Though the impact of racism and sexism on African American women has been addressed by several authors (e.g., Beale, 1970; King, 1975; Lindsey, 1970; Scott; 1982; Smith & Stewart, 1983), little empirical research has been conducted on the combined effects of racism and sexism on African American women. What is missing from the literature is an explanation of the role racial identity plays in African American women's perceptions of sexism. In other words, how does the racial identity of African American women influence their perceptions of sexism (sex bias)? When evaluating the salience of sexism and racism the context must be considered (Smith & Stewart, 1983).

Racial Identity

Helms (1990) defined racial identity as a sense of group or collective identity based on one's perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular group. Over the last twenty years, a number of theorists have developed models of racial identity, including Cross (1971), Helms (1984), Parham (1989), Phinney (1989), and Poston (1990). Cross' model, describing positive African American identity formation, is one of the most frequently cited and thoroughly researched models in the literature. The model was originally described with five stages; the majority of the literature, however, focuses on the first four. In Preencounter, the traditional Euro-American world view is idealized and the African American view is devalued. Some individuals in this stage may not identify as African American, or may not view Blackness positively. In the second stage, Encounter, a traumatic event occurs that challenges the individual's existing world view. This leads to a questioning of the present belief system and a search for a more compatible one. Immersion-Emersion, the third stage, is characterized by a rejection of the dominant culture and an immersion into African American culture as a way of resolving the previous conflicts. This stage is pro-African American, anti-White. In the fourth stage, Internalization, a positive African American identity is finally developed. The individual develops a secure sense of self as a ethnic being, and is able to accept other groups for what they are.

Cross' (1971, 1978) model has been used to explain racial identity development for African Americans, and the attitudes African Americans hold about themselves and others (e.g., Parham & Helms, 1981, 1985a, 1985b). In one of the few studies of women in this area, Pyant and Yanico (1991) found this model to be somewhat predictive of African American women's racial identity development.

Women's Identity

Most of the racial identity literature has not addressed the differing experiences of African American women and men. because men and women are often socialized in different ways, their experiences are often conceptualized and perceived differently (Gilligan, 1982). Myers (1991) noted some of the limitations of the current models. Their oversimplification of the nature of ethnic minorities as well as their categorization of individuals into one sphere limits their applicability. She suggested that there is often an interaction of identity variables that the identity models fail to address. There is a need to explore the influence of one's biological sex, education, and experiences in the community and in schools on racial identity development (Thompson, 1990). For example, an African American woman in the Preencounter stage might perceive less racial discrimination because race is not as salient in that stage. However, an African American woman in Immerson-Emersion would probably be more sensitive to racial discrimination in that stage than in any other stage.

Several authors have address the impact of sex bias on women (e.g., Follett, Andberg, & Hendel, 1982; Ossana, Helms, & Leonard, 1992). Women, as a group, are still faced with indirect forms of discrimination (Bernard, 1988). Follett et al. (1982) conducted a study on perceptions of the college environment by women and men. They found that women and men do have different perceptions of their educational environment. They suggested that one's biological sex, socialization, and the higher or lower status of individuals, as a result of their sex, influences students' perceptions.

Some authors have suggested that the awakening of women to sex bias can initiate a process of feminist or womanist identity development (e.g., Bernard, 1988; Downing & Roush, 1985; Ossana et al., 1992). Downing and Roush (1985) explained that women, in the process of feminist identity development, may stagnate or remain fixed in a particular state or they may slip backwards into a earlier stage as a result of life experiences.

Helms (cited in Ossana et al., 1992) proposed a four-stage model of women identity development which involves movement from an external and societal based definition of womanhood to an internal definition. It is the woman's own values, beliefs, and abilities that determine the quality of her womanhood. Using attitudes derived from the womanist identity model, Ossana et al. 1992) found a significant negative relationship between year in school and perception of sex bias in campus environment. An unexpected finding was that the level of womanist internalization attitudes was inversely related to perceptions of sex bias. As predicted, womanist internalization attitudes were positively related to self-esteem.

In general, gender/womanist identity literature and literature on sex bias have failed to consider race as a potential moderating variable. Dugger (188) emphasized the need for gender-role literature to address the complexity of the dual identity of African American women. She stated that the generalizations about sexism are race specific and that feminist theories, in particular, need to begin to consider the impact of race on African American women's perception of sexism. A woman's race influences the way in which sexism is perceived (Smith & Stewart, 1983).

Authors contributing to racial identity and women's literature have begun to propose an interactionist approach to race and sex. Reid and Comas-Diaz (1990) provided support for the combined interaction of race and sex variables. The authors stated that the identity formation of ethnic minority women involves a complex interaction of gender socialization and ethnicity. The interaction effects of ethnic and sex variables influence an ethnic woman's sense of self and her role society.

Smith and Stewart (1983) provided insight into the dual identity of African American women. They explained that an African American woman's level of racial or womanist identity may vary depending on her surroundings. African American women are faced with the dilemma of often trying to decide which of their characteristics led to a given experience. Individuals acquire different identities depending on the developmental stage that they are in (Reid & Comas-Diaz, 1990). Though some authors have addressed the interaction of race and sex variables, little empirical research has been done on the interaction of racial identity and womanist identity development. Lykes (1983) explored the effects of discrimination as a result of racism and sexism on a small group of older African American women using oral histories. The author investigated the various coping styles of his subjects in particular situations. He found that the way in which African American women cope with their experiences of discrimination depends on a number of factors, such as: the context in which the experience occurred, the type of discrimination that was experienced, the racial composition of one's work place, and the perceived source of discrimination. With the exception of very few studies, little empirical work exists that investigates the interaction of race and sex in the lives of African American women.

Of interest to this study are revisions made to the Cross (1971, 1978) model. Cross (1991) explained that a contemporary explanation of racial identity attitudes should consider the extent to which race is more or less salient at different racial identity stages. In keeping with this theory , race would be less salient at the Preencounter stage than at the Encounter stage and race would probably be most salient at the Immersion-Emersion stage. Resolution of one's racial identity conflicts in the Internalization stage makes it possible to shift attention to other identity concerns, such as womanist identity (Cross, 1991). If race and sex variables do influence each other, as is proposed by some authors, it is reasonable to expect that a woman's racial identity may influence her perception of sex bias (Ossana et al., 1992).

Our intention was to study African American female college students at a predominantly African American college and a predominantly White college to learn more about their salient identities as African Americans and as women. We assume that there are many aspects to our identities, and that different aspects are more salient in certain situations. In this instance, we made the following overall hypothesis:

African American women attending a predominantly White institution would see their race as more salient than their sex, because they would be in an environment that facilitated such a focus. African American women attending a predominantly African American institution would see their sex as more salient than their race, because they would be in an environment that met their racial needs, making the racial aspect of their identities less challenging than the gender aspect.

Method

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Participants

Sample 1. Participants from the first sample (n=95) were drawn from a midwestern university with a predominantly African American student population. The majority of the participants identified themselves as African American (96%). Sixty-one percent of the participants were female, and 39% were male. Ages ranged from 18 to 29 years (M=20, SD=2.14), and the group consisted of 14% freshmen, 54% sophomores, 26% juniors, 4% seniors, and 1% graduate students.

Sample 2. Participants in the second sample (n=90) were drawn from a midwestern university with a predominately White student population. The sampling method for the second sample targeted African American females. Thus, participants in the second sample were female and the majority identified themselves as African American (93%). Ages ranged from 18 to 52 (M=22, SD=6.16), and the group consisted of 24% freshman, 20% sophomores, 21%, juniors, and 34% seniors.

Procedure

For the first sample, the instruments were administered in three undergraduate classes to students who agreed to participate in the study. There were two methods used to collect data from the second sample. First, a list of the names and addresses of all African American female students were obtained through the Office of Multicultural Affairs. From this list, 200 students were randomly selected and mailed the instruments, a letter inviting their participation, and a stamped, return address envelope. Eighty students returned the instruments, yielding a 40% return rate. In addition, the instruments were administered to ten participants at a African American sorority outreach program.

Both samples of participants were given the opportunity to participate in exchange for a chance to win a $20 gift certificate to a music store (one given at each institution). Completion of the instruments required approximately 30 minutes.

Instruments

Attitudes Toward Women Scale (ATW: Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1973). The ATW is a widely used measure of attitudes regarding sex roles. The 25-item instrument presents a series of statements regarding sex roles and utilizes Likert type responses ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree); lower scores represent a more traditional sex role ideology. Previous studies have supported evidence for the reliability and validity of the 25-item version of the ATW using cross-cultural samples (e.g., Nelson, 1988; Stanley, Boots, & Johnson, 1975). Daugherty and Dambrot (1986) obtained a Cronbach's alpha of .89 and a Spearman-Brown split-half of .86.

Racial Identity Attitudes Scale (RAIS; Helms & Parham, 1984). The RAIS is a 50-item scale that measures attitudes corresponding to the four stages of Cross' model of African American identity development (Preencounter, Encounter, Immersion/Emersion, Internalization). The scale uses a Likert-type response scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Scores for each subscale indicate the degree to which the

individual endorse attitudes characteristic of that stages of development. The RAIS is scored by summing the points for each subscale response and dividing by the number of items in that subscale. Helms and Parham (1984) obtained the following internal consistency reliability coefficients for the subscales: Preencounter, .76; Encounter, .51; Immersion/Emersion, .69; Internalization, .79. Evidence for the RAIS' construct validity has been demonstrated by Grace (1984) and Helms (1990).

Vignettes. The authors developed a pool of potential vignettes designed to elicit responses about racial and/or sexual bias. The vignettes were then reviewed by a panel of African American and Caucasian faculty and staff to determine whether they had face validity, and to ascertain which vignettes elicited the strongest responses. Based on that feedback, one vignette was selected for use with this study. Participants were given the vignette and asked to indicate whether the "story" described a biased situation (yes, no, unsure). If the answer was yes, then respondent then indicated whether the bias was based on (a) race, (b) sex, (c) equally on race and sex, (d) mostly on race, partly on sex, (e) mostly on sex and partly on race, or (f) some other type of discrimination. Respondents were also allowed space to include any other comments that they wished to make about the vignette.

Demographic information. A brief, author-generated survey collected data on sex, race, age, year in college, and college major.

Results

The results indicated that women at the two institutions did not differ in levels of feminist attitudes, $t=1.12$, $p=.13$. They did differ in levels of Encounter and Immersion, however, with women at the predominately African American institution having higher encounter scores than women at the predominantly White institution, $t=-2.43$, $p=.02$. They also had higher Immersion scores than women at the predominantly White institution, $t=-1.75$, $p=.04$. The ATW had a significant negative correlation with Preencounter scores, -.398, $p \leq .01$, and a significant positive correlation with Internalization, .213, $p \leq .05$. Preencounter also correlated negatively with Internalization, -.427, $p \leq .01$.

The majority of women from both institutions perceived the vignette as discriminatory (39 of 51 women from the predominantly African American institution and 64 of 70 women from the predominately white institution). Women at the predominantly African American institution tended to see the vignette as showing equal amounts of racial and sexual discrimination, while women from the predominately White institution perceived the discrimination as racial, equally racial and sexual, or mostly racial and some sexual. This finding somewhat supports our hypothesis, as race alone was a stronger focus of the women from the predominantly white institution.

A stepwise multiple regression was performed, using vignette bias as the dependent variable and ATW and the four RAIS subscales as independent variables. The results indicated that only Internalization was a significant predictor of bias, $F= 5.24$, $p=.02$; however, Internalization only explained 4% of the variance in vignette scores.

Examining the small sample of men from the predominantly African American institution in comparison to our sample of women from the same institution, the results indicate that women had higher feminism scores, $t=3.61$, $p=.001$, and lower immersion scores, $t=-2.15$, $p=.04$,

than their male counterparts. The majority of both sexes perceived the vignette as discriminatory (18 of 27 men and 39 or 51 women). While women from this institution, as reported earlier, saw the discrimination as equally racial and sexual, men tended to label the discrimination as racial, equally racial and sexual, or mostly racial with some sexual. In other words, they followed the pattern of the women from the predominantly White institution in their beliefs. None of the males saw the discrimination as sexual only.

Discussion

This study was designed to examine the salient identifies of African American female college students at a predominantly African American and a predominantly white institution. was expected that women at the African American school would find gender bias more salient than race bias, because they would already be in an environment that met their racial needs, but possibly not their gender needs. Women at the predominantly white institution on the other hand, would view race as more salient, because their environment would not adequately met their racial needs, although gender needs might be met.

The results indicate that women at the two institutions did not differ in levels of feminist attitudes. Attitudes as measured by this scale do not discriminate between women at different race-based institutions. These women did differ on some levels of racial identity, namely encounter and immersion. Women at the African American institution had higher scores on these two scales than did women at the white institution. This is not surprising, given the nature of these two scales. Encounter measures one's personal awareness that race can make a difference, and one's questioning of the dominant society's values and how they might relate to African American values. A student at a African American school may find herself in such a different atmosphere that it causes her to question many things. In addition, Immersion measures a pro-African American, anti-white attitude; again it is not surprising that such attitudes would be more prevalent in a space in which few whites interact. These women may have chosen such an atmosphere because of their beliefs, or their beliefs may have changed after arrival and exposure to different views.

The majority of women from both institutions perceived the vignette as discriminatory. Women at the predominantly African American institution tended to see equal levels of racial and sexual discrimination, while women from the predominantly perceived the discrimination as racial, equally racial and sexual, or mostly racial and some sexual. This finding somewhat supports our hypothesis, as race alone was a stronger focus of the women from the predominantly white institution.

A multiple regression examining attitudes toward women, and the four racial identity stages, indicates that only internalization scores are predictive of vignette perceptions. It appears that women who are more internalized are most likely to see both types of bias inherent in the vignette. Internalized women have developed a personal sense of racial identity, and are able to move beyond culturally defined beliefs. It is possible that these women do not view situations as African American and white, so to speak, but see the gray areas inherent in daily life.

What does it all mean? It seems that women did not differ in levels of feminist thought across the two institutions, but demonstrated higher encounter and immersion scores at the predominantly African American institution. In other words, African American women at a predominantly African American institution are more likely to be beginning to recognize the

discrepancies in their treatment in a "White" system, and to have a higher level of immersion; i.e., they hold a stronger "pro-African American, anti-White " attitudes. The vignette findings, however, are even more significant. Women at the African American institution saw race and sex together as playing a part, while women from the predominantly white institution saw race as most salient. This finding on the vignette somewhat supports our hypothesis, that women at white institutions will be more focused on race instead of sex. It is surprising that we didn't see more variability in their scores, but the message is clear. Also, the women from the predominantly African American institution saw race as important, but were equally likely to choose one of the options that included sex. This suggests that these women were paying more attention to sexual discrimination than their counterparts, which would run true to our hypothesis.

Limitations and Implications

The author-generated vignette was designed to elicit bias toward racial or sexual discrimination. Future studies could utilize the Campus Environment Survey (CES), a measure designed to assess students' views and experiences on campus with regard to gender discrimination, to determine whether there is a relationship between students' experiences with gender discrimination and their perceptions of racial or sexual discrimination on the vignette.

The result of the current study must be generalized with caution. Only two midwestern universities were involved in the data collection. Perhaps different results would be obtained in other geographical locations.

Future studies may further study the relationship between class level (i.e., freshman, sophomore, junior, or senior), racial identity, and feminist identity. Do seniors at a predominantly white institution have higher levels of integration and feminist identity? Do seniors at a predominantly African American institution have even higher level of immersion and feminist identity than other groups?

The current study provides one of the first examinations of racial identity and perceptions of discrimination among African American women. The results of this study suggest that African American women from a predominantly white institution perceive more racial discrimination than African American women from a predominantly African American institution. This has important implications for counseling and psychotherapy. Planning appropriate intervention strategies and increasing the coping skills of women who may be experiencing racial discrimination may be the first step in alleviating the feelings (e.g., guilt, anger, self-hatred, depression) that accompany racial discrimination.

Please read the following vingette, then answer the questions following it.

During the third week of the semester, an African American female student asks a question in class about an upcoming assignment. She is shocked when the instructor cuts her off in mid-thought and tells her rudely that she should have asked about the assignment the first week of school; he won't interrupt his lecture plans to talk about it now. She decides not to argue about it with him. Later in the hour, however, she notices that a White male student in the back of the room, who always asks off-topic questions, has the instructor's undivided attention. This goes on for five minutes, without one comment that the class must move on. The student is even more angry than she was before.

1. In your opinion, does this story describe a biased situation?

   _____ A. Yes
   _____ B. No
   _____ C. Unsure

2. If your answer to question 1 was Yes, how would you describe the bias in this situation? (CHOOSE ONLY ONE ANSWER)

   _____ A. It's based on race.
   _____ B. It's based on sex.
   _____ C. It's based equally on race and sex.
   _____ D. It's based mostly on race and only partly on sex.
   _____ E. It's based mostly on sex and only partly on race.
   _____ F. It's based on the following type of discrimination: _____

Comments about this vingette.

Crosstabulations of responses for Males and Females at a predominantly African American institution to the vignette questions

Vignette Question 1 (Does this story describe a biased situation?)

Sex	Yes	No	Unsure
Female	39	3	9
Male	18	3	6

Vignette question 2 (How would you describe the bias in this situation?)

Sex	Race	Sex	Race=Sex	Race>sex	Race<Sex	Other
Female	5	2	21	9	2	1
Male	6		8	5	1	2

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Crosstabulations of Responses to Vignette questions for Women in the two Samples

Vignette Question 1 (Does this story describe a biased situation?)

School	Yes	No	Unsure
White College	64	2	4
African American College	39	3	9

Vignette Question 2 (How would you describe the bias in this situation?)

School	Race	Sex	Race=Sex	Race>Sex	Sex>Race	Other
White College	21	2	20	17	2	1
African American College	5	2	21	9	2	4